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# Starting Off

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## *Chapter 2*

# STARTING OFF

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## ABSTRACT

This book is really a reflection of the past 15 years of work with teens and suicide prevention in the state of Kentucky. The work to establish the "Stop Youth Suicide Campaign (SYS)" has resulted in contact with many young adults and we have found that the most important thing for all of them, was finding a caring person they trust and can talk to. Because of the constant need, the SYS went from a goal of one year awareness campaign to a major community resource, to work with the state and local governments and state legislators to add as many resources as possible. We have witnessed for the 1st time a drop of youth suicide rates below the national average according to the 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance done biannually by the Center for Disease Control. In this book we will tackle various topics and specific populations in relation to suicide written by people who work with teens and care about them.

## INTRODUCTION

In December 1999, I received a call from Dr. Dennis Pen, who was the Lexington/Fayette county coroner at the time. He told me that he is feeling desperate, exacerbated and powerless every time he has to deal with the suicide death of an adolescent and wanted to see if there is anything we can do to reduce youth suicide. After many meetings and discussions, we decided to start an awareness campaign in the state and in October 2000, we launched the

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Stop Youth Suicide Campaign (SYS). At the time, we thought that we would do a full year of awareness on the subject.

We conducted a statewide survey that showed 71% of the respondents knew of someone who committed suicide, yet only 13% knew that suicide was the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death among youth in the state. We started a website ([stopyouthsuicide.com](http://stopyouthsuicide.com)), partnered with media outlets, schools and churches and this collaboration started the campaign.

Soon after, I started getting requests for help from many teens and I realized that we can help. While there are many suicide prevention programs, the fact remains that most of them rely on identifying those at risk and then referring them to treatment. The first problem with that is that many teens fall in the category of “same day suicide,” meaning kids who could not be identified as at risk, because they do not have any mental health problems. They just run into a problem that feels unsolvable and have no one to turn to. The second problem is that mental health resources are not readily available and when they are present, they are limited by insurance and other factors and teens treated in inpatient facilities for a brief period actually end up with many fold increase in their suicide risk.

## **FIFTEEN YEARS OF SUICIDE PREVENTION**

During the last 15 years, I have worked with an average of 1,000 young adults who asked for help and learned that the most important thing for all of them, was finding a caring person they trust and can talk to. Because of the constant need, the SYS went from a goal of one year awareness campaign to a major community resource that I could not end. From there we went on to work with the state and local governments and state legislators to add as many resources as possible. We have witnessed for the 1st time a drop of youth suicide rates below the national average according to the 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance done biannually by the Center for Disease Control.

This book will tackle various topics and specific populations in relation to suicide written by people who work with teens and care about them not by people reviewing the literature. Every author has worked with teens and teen suicide for many years and I feel that makes this book different from others.